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ABSTRACT

Using pattern observation, this study examined the relationship between communication in a small group of children and basic parameters of social support (quantity, content, structure, and function of the communication). Researchers observed two separate groups. Subjects were 77 children (54 girls and 23 boys), ages 5-7. Data showed that: (1) when children were engaged in activities, a child's specific position in an activity created conditions for communication skill development; (2) exchange of opinions arose spontaneously out of practical necessity during activities; (3) level of communication effectiveness influenced the emotional satisfaction of the child; (4) status level, number of children, connections between children, and the emotional expansiveness and satisfaction of children within the group all affected a child's self-perception; and (5) social support afforded children opportunities to expand the adaptive nature of their own behavior. Contains 12 references. (JW)

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COMMUNICATION OF CHILDREN WITH OTHER PEOPLE AND SOCIAL SUPPORT

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THEORETICAL POSITION

Communication with other people is an interactive, creative process of mutual change and cognition through which mechanisms of social influence on children are manifested on one side and conditions are created for each child to perform social activities on the other side.

Social needs, being directly connected with social activity, are one of the first to be manifested in the life of the infant. The meeting of these needs influences the different organizational levels of child individuality. This determines to a great extent the integrated nature of behaviour. The concrete manifestation of the social activity of children in the process of social intercourse and self-awareness, the mastering of adequate social behaviour and social values awareness are prerequisites for adapting as well as for stimulating each infant's free will.

Communication within a small group influences the subjective perception of the objective and creates satisfaction with social resourses. That is why the mastering of the communication mechanisms enables the child to react more adequately to the dynamic social environment, to adapt him/herself, to get self-organized at different levels, to search personal place and personal sense, to assert his/her own individuality.

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Social support, being one of the most important parametres of the infant's communication with other people, favourably modifies the influence of the objective social conditions. Furthermore, it is a kind of a buffer in inevitable stressful situations in the life of every infant. Determining the subjective perception of objective social conditions, social support turns stress into subjective distress, modifies its psychical and physiological effects and even creates satisfaction in objectively stessful situations. /fig.1/

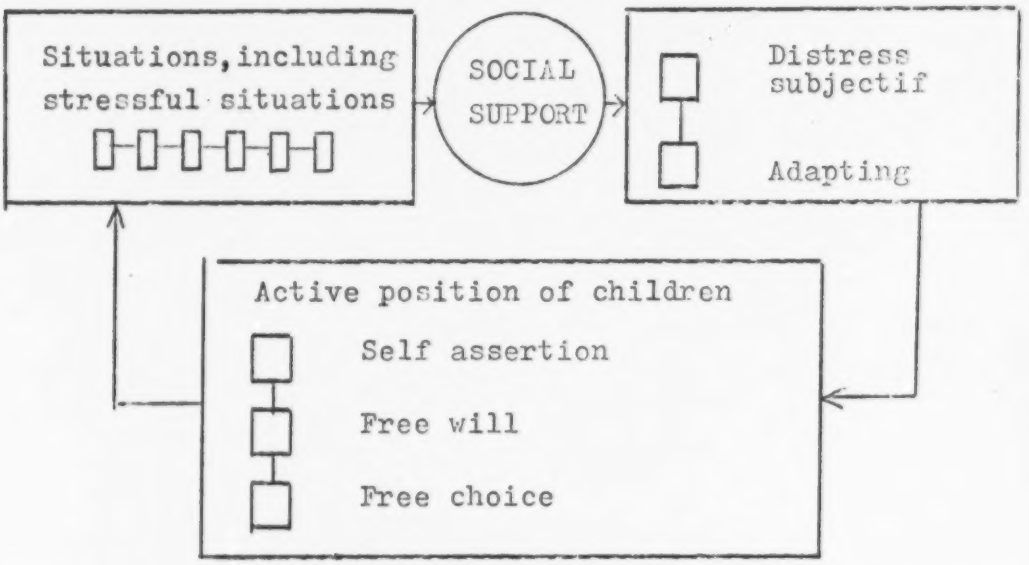

Fig.2.Cocial support and the active position of the child

Therefore, the social support has got a clearly manifested adaptive role. On the contrary, the breaking of the social contacts and the attachment of others to the young child arouses emotional discomfort, negative feelings, unpleasant experiences and difficult adaptation. In this sense the social support has even got a biological resonance. Besides, it is a condition for the preservation of the individual autonomy and the manifestation of the child's active position in the process of his/her free choice.

AIMS AND PURPOSES OF THE RESEARCH

Having in mind the briefly presented theoretical considerations we set forth the objective to investigate the dependence and the specific relation between the process of communication in a small group of infants and the basic parametres of the social support - quantity, content, structure and functions of social contacts between infants. /fig. 2/

The following tasks have been defined for this purpose:

1. To study the influence of the structural components of the social role the young child plays in the process of executing different kinds of activities upon the acquisition of the ability to communicate which includes: active interaction, emotional and evaluative attitude towards the partner, taking into consideration the group norms and participating in their establishment, friendliness and realization of free choice.

2. To establish the most important parametres of the personal interactions between children which directly influence "the warmth" and trust in the group.

3. To determine the functions of the verbal means of communication between young children in a group and their influence on the characteristics of social contacts.

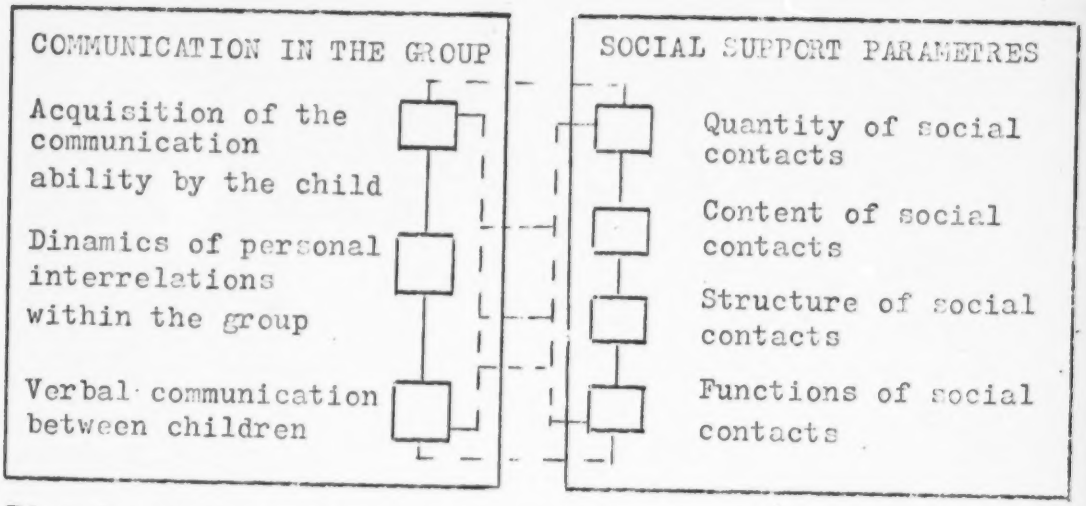
COMMUNICATION IN THE GROUP
Acquisition of the communication ability by the child
Dinamics of personal interrelations within the group
Verbal communication between children
SOCIAL SUPPORT PARAMETRES
Quantity of social contacts
Content of social contacts
Structure of social contacts
Functions of social contacts

Fig. 2. Communication within the group and the social support for the child

HYPOTHESIS

We have supposed that:

- the expectation, understanding, attitude and the performance of the social role in the execution of a specific activity influence the child interactions, the emotional and evaluative attitude towards his/her partners, the manifestation of friendliness and free choice;

- the position of the child in the group determined by his/her role influence the quantity, content, structure and functions of his/her social contacts. The role dynamics dynamizes social support as well;

-the emotional satisfaction of the child with the interactions within the group is a manifestation of the social support the young child gets;

-some of the parametres of the personal interactions between children directly influence the social support parametres;

- the verbal communication between children has got specific functions concerning the social support parametres.

METHODS OF INVESTIGATION

1. RESEARCH METHOD - "pattern" observation. AIM of the observation: evaluation of children's role behaviour in performing different kinds of activities; evaluation of the role communication.

OBSERVATION UNITS: Group I: child's expectation of the role, role understanding, attitude towards the role, role performance. Group II: attitude towards the partner, manifested interactions, keeping group norms, free choice.

OBSERVATION "PATTERN" - introduction of 4-grade polar scale for each observation unit with two positive and two negative grades. For example, concerning the role "expectation" - grade "a" means clearly manifested positive expectation, grade "b" - positive expectation, grade "c" - negative expectation, grade "d" - clearly negative expectation./Tables 1, 2/

Table 1

OBSERVATION PATTERN POLAR SCALE N 1

Name of child:																
Social roles in performing different kinds of activities	Role structure															
	Expectation				Understanding				Attitude				Performance			
	a	b	c	d	a	b	c	d	a	b	c	d	a	b	c	d

Table 2

OBSERVATION PATTERN POLAR SCALE N 2

Name of child:																
Social roles	Role communication															
	Attitude towards partner				Interaction				Keeping group norms				Free choice			
	a	b	c	d	a	b	c	d	a	b	c	d	a	b	c	d

METHOD OF EVALUATION: We related the data from the observation patterns given above (which were individual for each investigated child) to the standardized formula for the polarized method:

$$K = \frac{a/+1/ + b/+0,5/ + c/-0,5/ + d/-1/}{N}$$

where N is a product of the number of the roles performed by the child and the number of the role structural components (or in the case of pattern II - the number of the role communication parametres.

After processing the observation data, using the formula already mentioned above we got two coefficients which we were able to compare bearing in mind the first supposition of the hypothesis: the "role behaviour coefficient" /Table 1/ and the "role communication coefficient" /Table 2/.

In connection with the third objective we used once again the observation pattern AIMING at the evaluation of the verbal communications of each child. THE OBSERVATION UNITS corresponded to the functions of the verbal means of communication: contracting and planning of interactions; expressing emotional attitude; expressing evaluation of partners; accepting and understanding group norms; expressing own points of view in the process of interaction; standing own grounds; expressing friendliness and sympathy. We studied a child group in five different situations in which the manifestation of each of the pointed out functions of the verbal means of communication was graded by one point for the respective child. Therefore the maximum number of points gained by a single child for a single situation was 7 (seven), i.e. 35 for the five situations. The EVALUATION presupposed determining "a verbal communication coefficient" which was, in fact, a ratio between the number of gained points by the respective child and the potential maximum, i.e. - 35.

2. Another basic method of research - SOCIOMETRICAL (J. Moreno). The AIM of the sociometrical research was to define the quantity and structure of social contacts within a group of children, their content and functions (in connection with the second and fourth suppositions of the hypothesis). The sociometrical PROCEDURE included filling in a sociometrical matrix (Table 4). The moulding of the relationship between children was carried out on a sociogram.

3. Diagnostical method - STANDARDIZED INTERVIEW ON A PICTURE AIMING AT: evaluating a child's emotional

satisfaction with the relationship within the group as an indicator of his/her social support. METHOD OF EVALUATION. by determining a definite number of points for each question according to previously defined indices. The emotional satisfaction coefficient is the ratio between the points gained by a given child and the maximun possible number.

4.. Statistical method - CORRELATIVE ANALYSIS by descriptive alternative indications. The data were applied to the following standardized formula:

$$R = \frac{ad - bc}{/a + b/ \cdot /c + d/ \cdot /a + c/ \cdot /b + d/}$$

where the values of "a", "b", "c", "d" were determined by their disposition in the standardized scale. (Table 3)

INVESTIGATED PEOPLE

We studied 77 children from 5 to 7 years of age - 54 girls and 23 boys, included in preschool groups.

ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION OF RESEARCH RESULTS

1. To what extent does a child's social role in the process of performing different activities influence the acquisition of communication skills and does it reflect the social support for the child in the group?

The data from the observations included in the scales, already pointed out above, (Tables 1, 2) showed that the child's specific position in the activity, defined by his/her role and its structure realization, created conditions for communication skill development:

- each role and the rule "hidden" behind it require that the child should coordinate his/her

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activities with his/her partners, i.e. interact actively;

- satisfaction with the manifested activity and with the acquisition of the common aim in the interaction increases the demonstration of friendliness among children;

- the situation resulting from a respective activity stimulates the evaluation attitude of the child towards his/her partner as s/he is constantly comparing the practical realization of the activities with the aim s/he is aware of;

- the exchange of opinions among children which is spontaneously done in the process of practical interactions and interrelations, leads to the establishment of group norms which the child accepts as his/her own and from such a position s/he complies with them;

- the evaluation follows or it itself arouses emotional attitude towards the partner as a result of which the child is directed in his/her communication not only by the peculiarities of the situation but also by the emotional manifestations of the others;

- the emotional attitudes among the interacting children are expressed in sympathies, mutual experiences, likings, friendly devotions;

- Likings bring children together for a comparatively short time. They are dynamic and vaguely motivated. Nevertheless, they are a necessary stage to establishing more stable emotional interrelations between two or more children and towards the process of making friends. The following condition proved to be with the highest frequency for their establishment and consolidation: the accumulation of pleasant experiences with a concrete partner as a result of a successful role interaction. On the contrary - the lack of role cooperation results in negative emotions and apathy;

- the mutual experience and sympathy were manifested on a different level: like stereotypical

reaction to somebody else's emotional state; by "external help" when there is no independent evaluation of the emotional situation; active sympathy when the child is aware of his/her partner's experience and undertakes respective actions and deeds.

The sides of the communication skill, pointed out above, were manifested rather dynamically depending on the degree of realization of the role structural components (expectation, attitude, understanding, performance). The correlation coefficient - 0,71 between the "role behaviour coefficient" and the "role communication coefficient" proves the relationship and the dependence between a child's communication ability and the degree of realization of the own role in performing the mutual activity. (fig. 3)

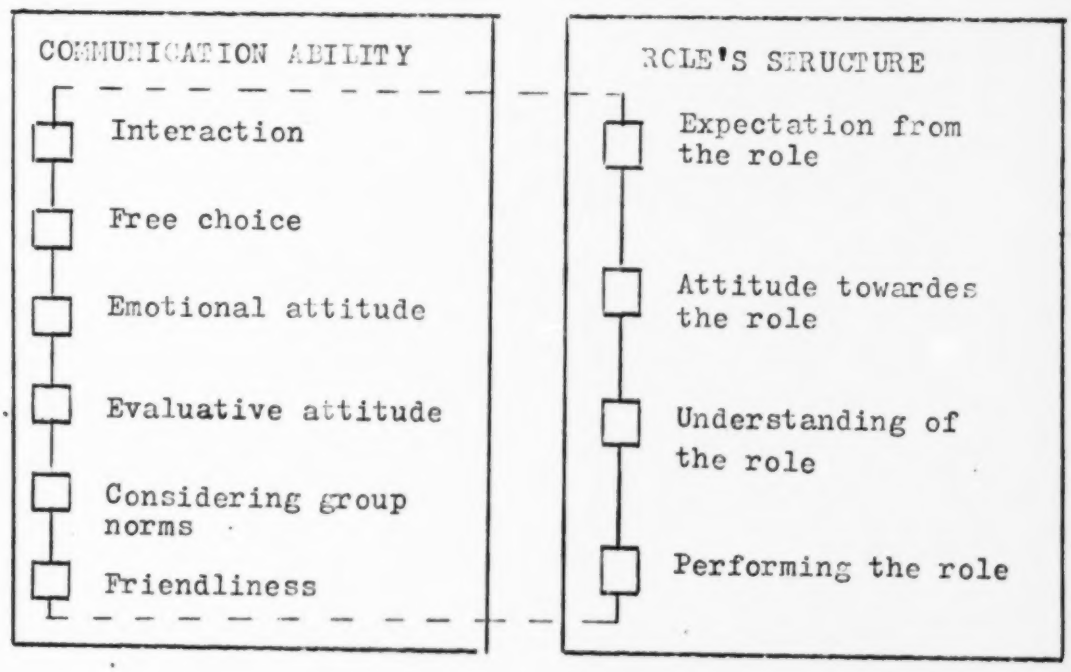

Fig. 3 Role structure and its influence on a child's acquisition of communication skill

Further on the empirical data answered the question whether the communication skill development stage evaluated by a specific coefficient for each specific child influences the social support for him/ her by the other members of the group. We matched the individual emotional satisfaction coefficient and role communication coefficient to the stage of descriptive alternative signs - high coefficient (C) 0,5, low C 0,4. The disposition of the coefficient, grouped in such a way in the correlational analysis table is shown in Table 3.

Table 3

Correlational analysis of the dependence between the role communication level and the emotional satisfaction

K_{rc} / K_{es}	HIGH	LOW	TOTAL
HIGH	a = 36	b = 5	/a + b/ = 41
LOW	c = 4	d = 32	/c + d/ = 36
TOTAL	a + c = 40	b + d = 37	a+b+c+d = 77

The correlation coefficient /R/ = 0,78 shows a high level of the communication skill influence on the social support /the indicator being the emotional satisfaction/ the child receives within the group.

2. To what extent does the dynamics of the personal interrelations within a group make the social support for the child more dynamic with its basic parametres: quantity, content, structure and functions of social contacts between a given child and the other members of the group?

The results of the sociometrical group investigations carried out by consecutive change of the child selection criteria were entered into sociometrical matrices. /Table 4/ The matrix reflects the distribution of preferences among children. It gives the possibility to see each child's position in the group interaction system.

Table 4

SOCIOMETRICAL MATRIX

N and name of the child	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	and so on
1.			○△+		△		△+			
2.	○+				○+			△		
3.	○△+				--		○+			
4.							○△+		+	
5.	○△+		△		+				○	
6.					○△+				○+	-
7.	△+			○△						
8.		○+			○△+					
9.				+	○	○△+				
and so on										
Number of the choices got by criteria	○									
	△									
	+									
Total number of choices obtained										

We found out the following essential parametres of personal interrelations among children within a group which influenced each child's subjective perception of his/her own position:

- Distribution of the individual status values for all children in the group;

- Number of children mutually preferring each other's company;

- Number of children belonging to groupings;

- Connection between groupings;

- Group average emotional expansiveness;

- Group average emotional satisfaction according to the distribution of mutual preferences among children.

The individual status and the sympathy reciprocity proved to be of extreme importance: the higher status and the greater number of mutual selections increase the child's attachment to the group, his/her positive experience of interrelations and social expansiveness. In this way the child feels more confident and "protected". On the contrary - the low status, the isolation from groupings, the lack of sympathy reciprocity create dissatisgaction and depression as a result of which the child ctarts experiencing all events in the group, even the objectively positive ones, in a negative way.

The quantity and structure of social contacts which are two of the most essential social support parametres, were definitely outlined in sociograms drawn on the basis of sociometrical matrices. (Fig. 4)

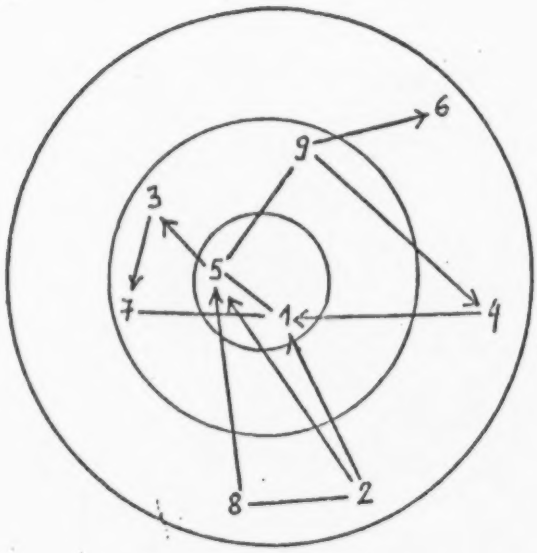

Fig. 4. Exerpt from the structure of interrelations in one of the studied groups (sociogram) by one of the applied criteria

The correlative analysis of the dependence between the emotional satisfaction coefficient of a given child and his/her individual status within a group showed a rather high correlation coefficient. Similar result characterized the dependence between the emotional satisfaction and the number of mutual preferences for a single child. (Fig. 5,6)

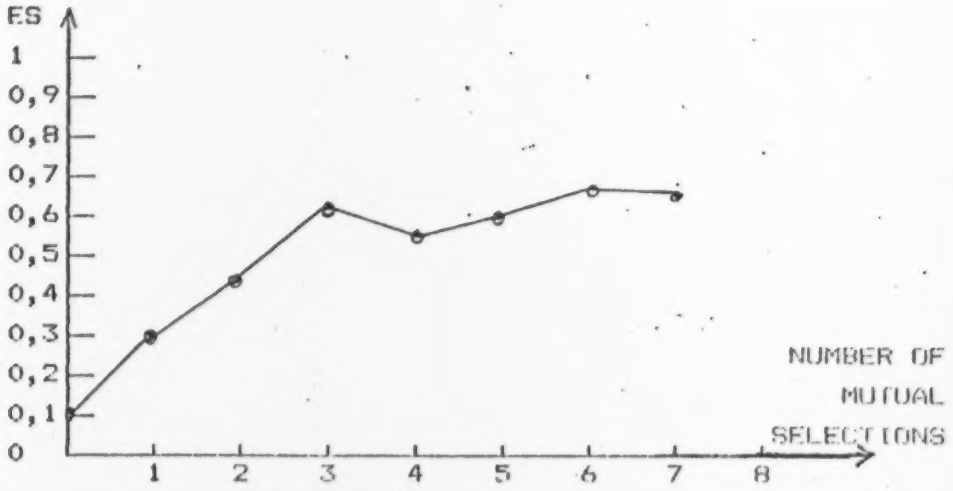

Fig.5 Curve of the distribution of the emotional satisfaction coefficients according to number of mutual selections

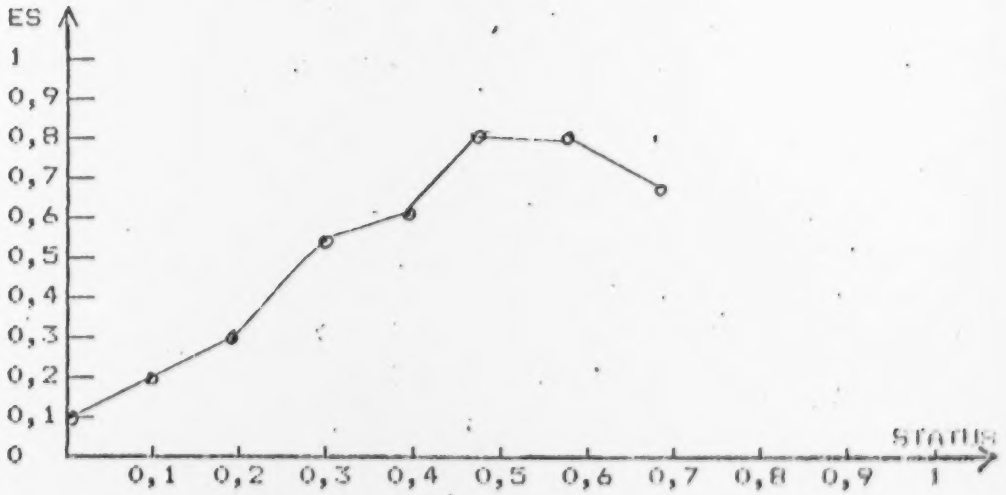

Fig.6 Curve of the distribution of the emotional satisfaction coefficient according to the status

The graphs in figures 5 and 6 clearly show that the emotional satisfaction increases with the increase of the number of mutual selections and the individual status:

- children having no mutual selection in the group sociometrical studies according to different criteria have an average emotional satisfaction coefficient 0,1. This coefficient is drastically raised up to 0,3 in children with only one mutual selection. The tendency is the same in children with two or more than two mutual selections. The average emotional satisfaction coefficient is the highest in children with six or seven mutual selections obtained from all the group sociometrical investigations;

- "isolated" children (with St = 0) have rather low average emotional satisfaction coefficient - 0,1. Emotional satisfaction immediately rises in status 0,1 - average coefficient 0,2. The emotional satisfaction is the highest in children with status 0,5 and 0,6.

Therefore, the status of a child within a group and the mutual liking between children influence in the strongest way two of the social support basic parametres - quantity and structure of social contacts. If we assume that using different selection criteria in the process of the sociometrical research we get data about the social contact content and functions as well and we can make an inference confirming an essential part of our hypothesis - the parametres of the personal interrelations among children in a group directly influence the parametres of each child's social support.

3. To what extent do the verbal means of communication with their specific functions influence the social support for a single child and does the

different level of accomplishing verbal communication make the social support more dynamic?

The observation in different situations in the direction of functions of the verbal means of communication (pointed out in the "METHODS OF INVESTIGATION") gave us the possibility to evaluate, by a respective coefficient, the level of verbal communication of each child of all the studied children. The following correlation was reached: 6 children showed C = 0,1; 12 children - C = 0,3; 10 children - C = 0,4; 6 children - C = 0,6; 14 children - C = 0,7; 17 children - C = 0,85 and 12 children - C = 0,9. "The frequency distribution" of these coefficients for the exerpt of 77 studied children is shown in the frequency graph. (fig. 7)

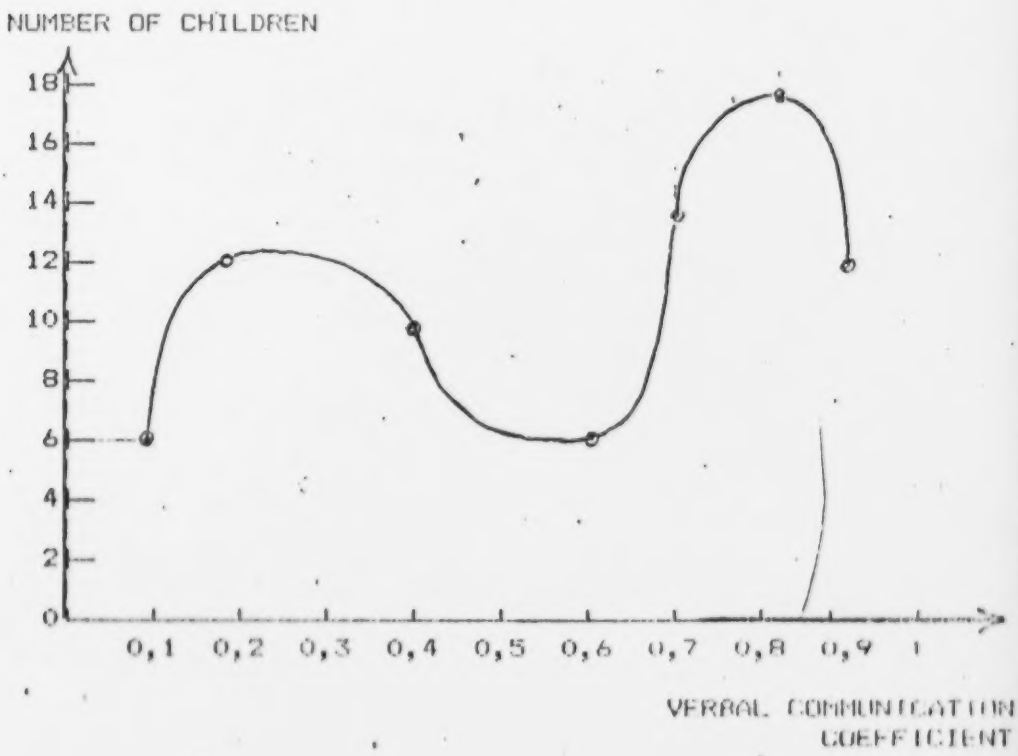

Fig. 7 Frequency distribution of coefficients of verbal communication among children

The graph analysis (fig. 7) shows that the mastering of the means of verbal communication is unevenly distributed in the studied contingent of children. Besides, it turned out that the coefficient of verbal communication was not directly proportional to the child status - some of the children with high status (0,6 - 0,7) had a comparatively low coefficient of verbal communication (0,05 up to 0,2). On the contrary - children with low status (0,1) got high coefficient of verbal communication (0,6 up to 0,8).

The coefficient of correlation between the level of verbal communication and emotional satisfaction was 0,56, i.e. significantly lower than the coefficient of correlation between the level of role communication and emotional satisfaction of children.

The data illustrated above gave us the ground to consider that the last part of our hypothesis was the weakest one - the level of verbal communication at this age does not emphatically affect the social support a child gets in the group. This dependence might be increased if the studied children are equalized in indices connected with their speach development. This could be the subject of a future study.

SUMMARIZED CONCLUSIONS

The child activity in the context of interpersonal relationships within a group of children mediates the influence of the mechanisms for social environment effect on his/her attitude and behaviour.

The social support which emerges and changes depending on the accumulation of group polysemantically determined interactions and interrelations, i. e. an important parametre of the interaction between social environment and a child.

The existence of social support gives a child an opportunity of expanding the adaptive nature of the

social interactions with individual behaviour deriving from "free will".

The changes that take place in the attitude of others towards a given child as a member of the group, depend to a great extent on the inner dynamics, structure and functional characteristics of social contacts within a group. In this sense the process of communication ia at one and the same time a process of adapting, self-organizing, self-asserting and finding a personal sense in the communicative mechanisms as well as in interpreting and evaluating the social events in the group by a single child.

A child in a social group where there is social support keeps to a significantly high degree his/her own identity, autonomy and free will.

A B S T R A C T

The study is directed towards communication in a small social group of children aged between 5 and 7. We tried to find the conditions and mechanisms determining the SOCIAL SUPPORT for a child within a group. We had in mind that the social support modified in a successful way the influence of objective social conditions on the behaviour, attitude and emotional state of each child in the group.

We followed the connections between the communication ability level, manifested in the performance of mutual activities, and the social support for a given child; the connections between the position of a child in the persolan interrelation system in the group and the social support parametres; the connections between the level of acquisition of the verbal means of communication and the social support.

We proved that the existence of social support expanded the adaptive nature of the social interactions among children with individual behaviour, which followed from the autonomy and "free choice" of the child.

LA COMMUNICATION DE L'ENFANT ET L'APPUI SOCIAL

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Maître de conference,
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Nous nous somme orientés vers l'analise d'un des plus importants paramètres de la communication - l'appui social, étant donné qu'il modifie favorablement l'action des conditions sociales obgectives. Il détermine la perception subjective de la réalité obgective, fait passer le stress à un distress subgectif, modifie les effets psychiques et physiologiques de ce dernier et crée même un sentiment de satisfaction face à des situations qui, obgectivement parlant, peuvent être qualifiées de veritables stress. (fig.1). En outre, il conditionne la conservation de l'autonomie individuelle et la réalisation de la position active de l'enfat dans le processus de son libre choix (fig.1).

OBGECTIF DE L'ETUDE

Nous nous sommes assigné le but d'étudier l'interdépendance et les liens spécifiques entre la communication au sein du groupe d'enfants et les paramètres fondamentaux de l'appui social pour chaque enfant: quantité, contenu, structure et fonctions des contacts sociaux.(fig.2)

HYPOTHESE

Par suite de l'analise théorique de l'obgectif et des tâches de l'étude, nous avons supposé que:

-la position spécifique de l'enfant lors du jeu, qui lui est conférée par son rôle au jeu, fait changer la quantité, le contenu, la structure et les fonctions des contacts sociaux entre

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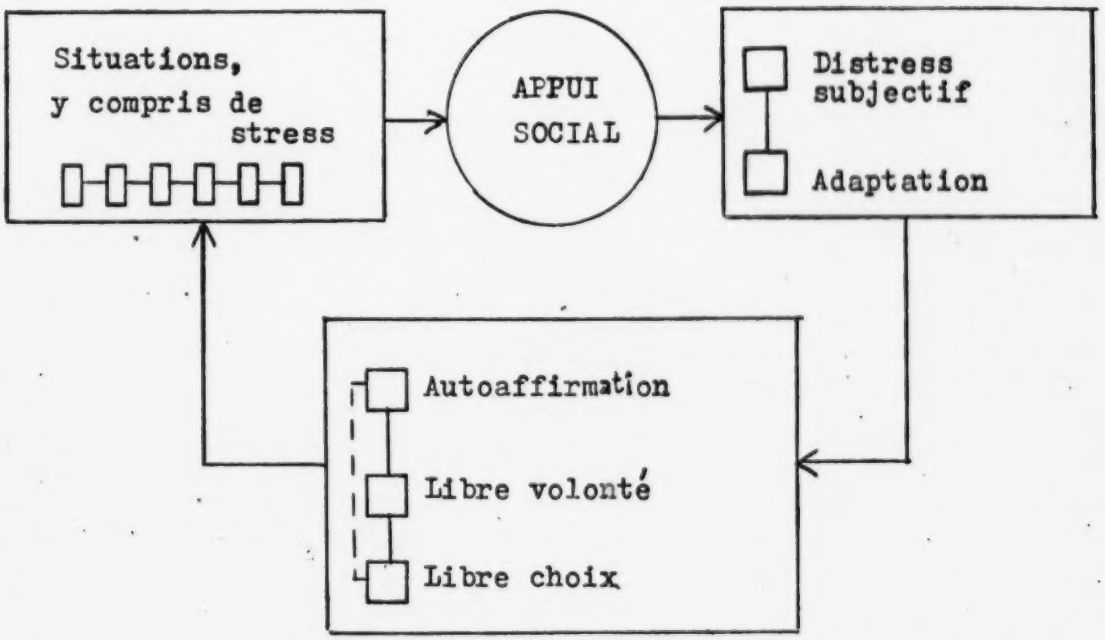

Fig.1. L'appui social détermine l'influence du milieu social sur l'enfant et en crée la position active

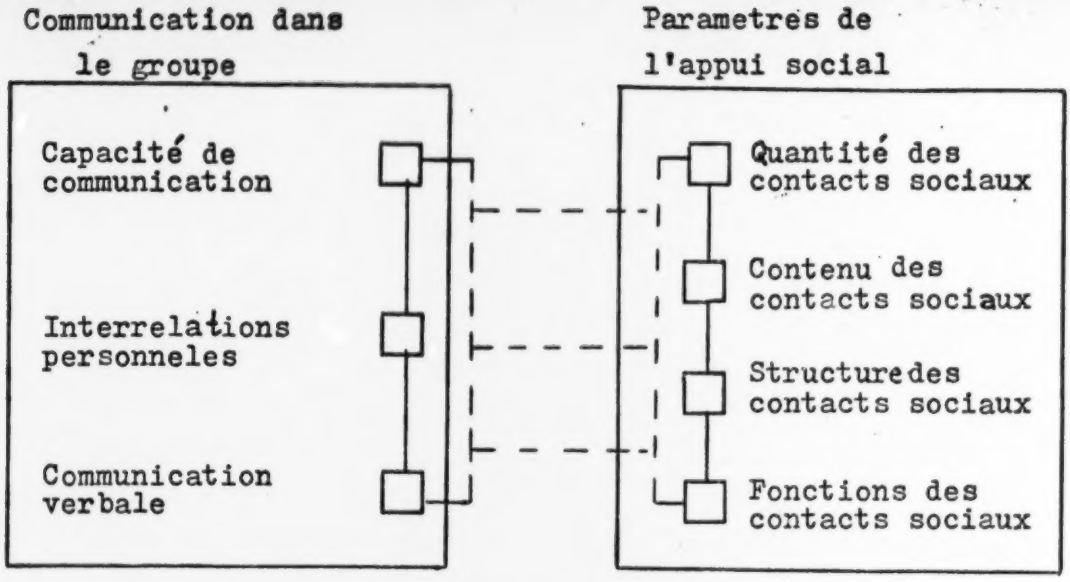

Fig.2. Communication dans la groupe et l'appui social

les enfants, c'est-à-dire que l'on pourrait s'attendre à la dynamisation de l'appui social; (fig.3)

- la satisfaction émotionnelle de l'enfant par suit des interrelations dans le groupe est l'expression même de l'appui social , dont il fait l'objet;

- certains paramètres des interrelations personnelles entre les enfants influencent directement et sont eux-mêmes partie de l'appui social;

- la communication verbale entre les enfants dans le groupe s'avère une pré-condition au développment de la capacité de communication et à la "conquête" d'une place satisfaisante par l'enfant concret dans le sisitème des interrelations enfantines.

PERSONNES ÉTUDIÉES

L'etude englobait une tranche de 77 enfants âgés de 5 à 7 ans , dont 54 fillettes et 23 garçons.

DES RESULTATS

Le traitement des résultats nous a orientés vers les suivants paramètres importants des interrelations entre les enfants, qui se répercutent sur le "climat propice" et la confiance dans le groupe(subjectivement perçus et sentis par chaque enfant):

- état individuel (status) de l'enfant dans le groupe;
- enfants se préférant réciproquement (choix reciproques);
- appartenance à un groupement;
- appartenance à plus d'un groupement;
- "isolement" face au groupe(enfants avec St = 0);
- expansivité émotionnelle (nombre des enfants choisis);
- satisfsction emotionnelle de chaque enfant, suscitée par les interrelations au sein du groupe (moyenne du coefficient

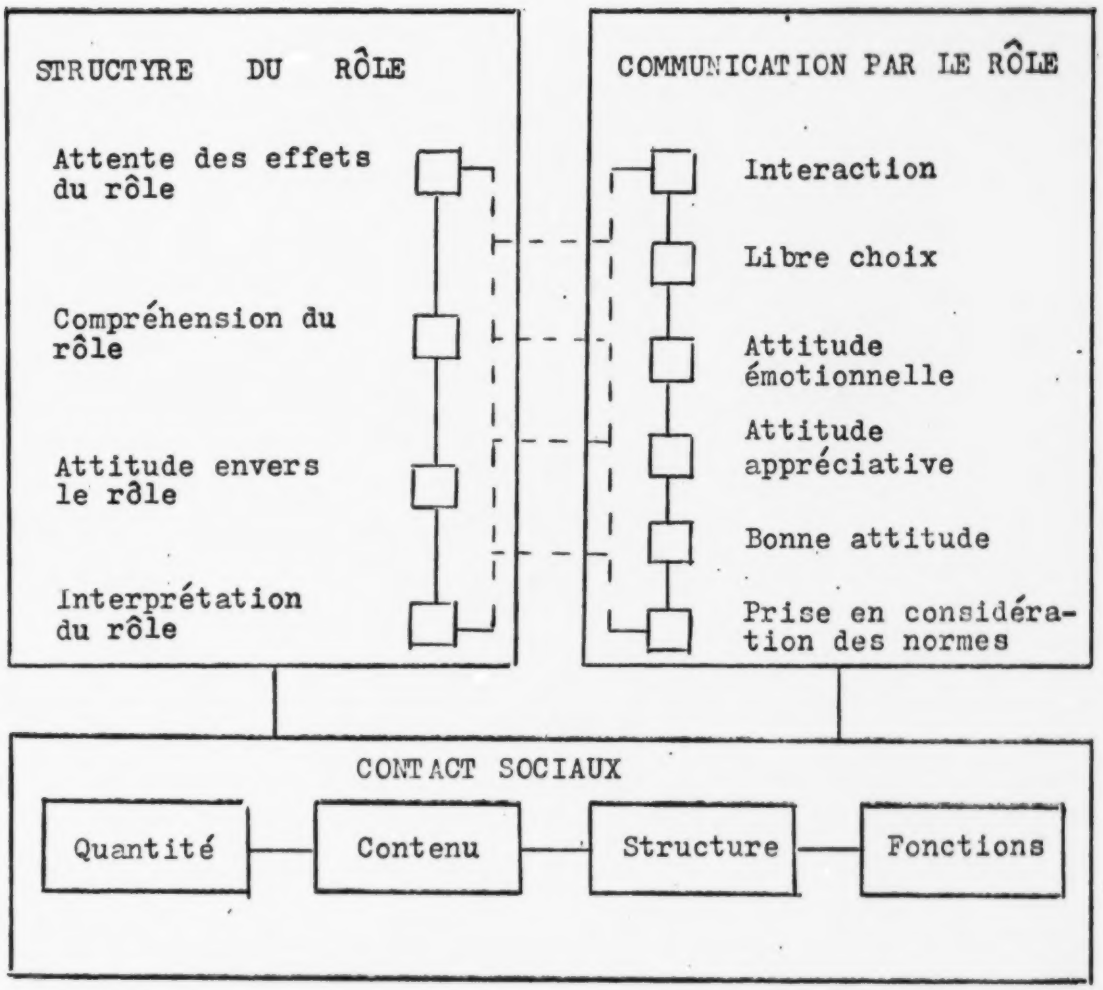

Fig.3. Structure du rôle au jeu, communication par le rôle, et contacts sociaux entre les enfants

de réciprocité et du St de l'enfant correspondant);

- degré des sentiments inspirés par l'état personnel propre, par la réciprocité ou le manque de réciprocité, par l'appartenance ou la non-appartenance au groupement, par l'isolement.

La correlation entre chacun des paramètres précités et les autres paramètres prouve , qu'en présence d'un degré plus élevé du status et de la réciprocité des sympathies , la plupart des enfants se sentent attachés au groupe, ils éprouvent et prennent conscience de leur place dans le sistème d'interrelations et s'emplissent de sympathie envers leurs camarades. Fort d'une telle position, l'enfant a plus de confiance en soi, il se sent "protégé". Inversement - les ennuis dans les interrelations (St peu éléve, isolement, absence de réciprocité au plan des sympathis) engendrent des sentiments d'insatisfaction chez l'enfant et une position négative à l'égard de tout les événements, y compris de ceux, qui sont objecteivement positifs.

La quantité et la structure des contacts sociaux, conçus en tant que deux des plus importants parametres de l'appui social, ont été evidences sur les sociogrammes. (fig. 4)

Il s'est avéré que le St de l'enfant et le nombre des préférences réciproques influencent au plus haut point sur sa satisfaction émotionnelle (fig. 5 et 6)

Les données de l'observation, à laquelle nous avons procédé dans différentes situations, nous ont permis de différencier les moyens verbaux de communication d'après leurs fonctions différentes:

- les enfants se mettent d'accord et projettent leurs interrelations;
- ils manifestent des attitudes émotionnelles;
- ils analysent les manifeststions de leur partenaire et

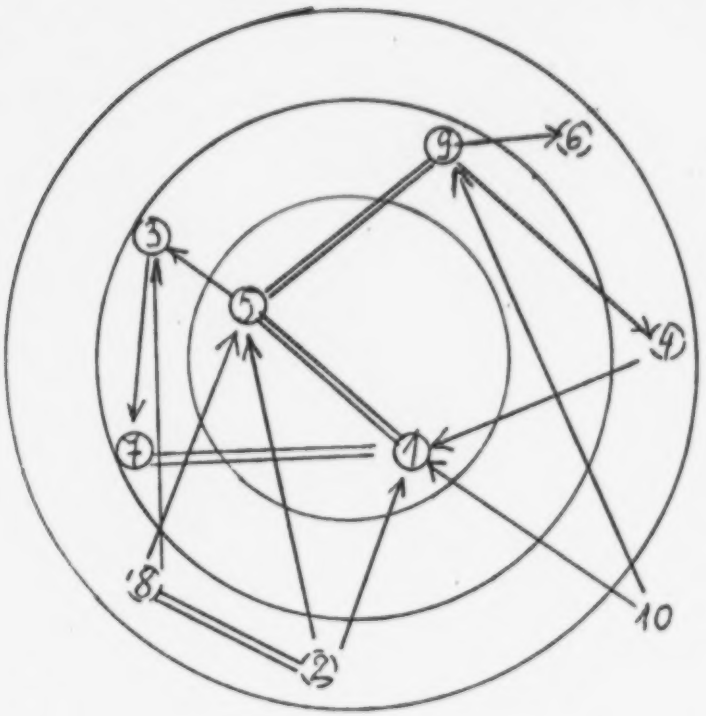

Fig.4. Structure des interrelations dans un des groupements - d'après le premier critère

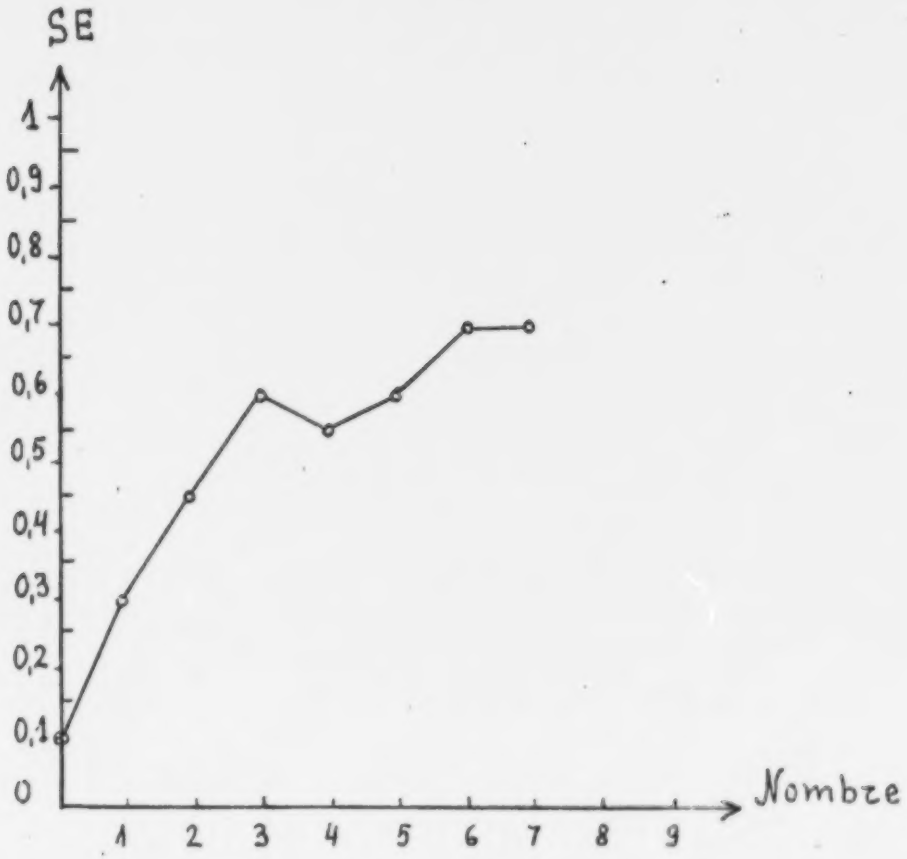

Fig.5. Courbe de la répartition du coefficient de satisfaction émotionnelle selon le nombre des choix réciproques

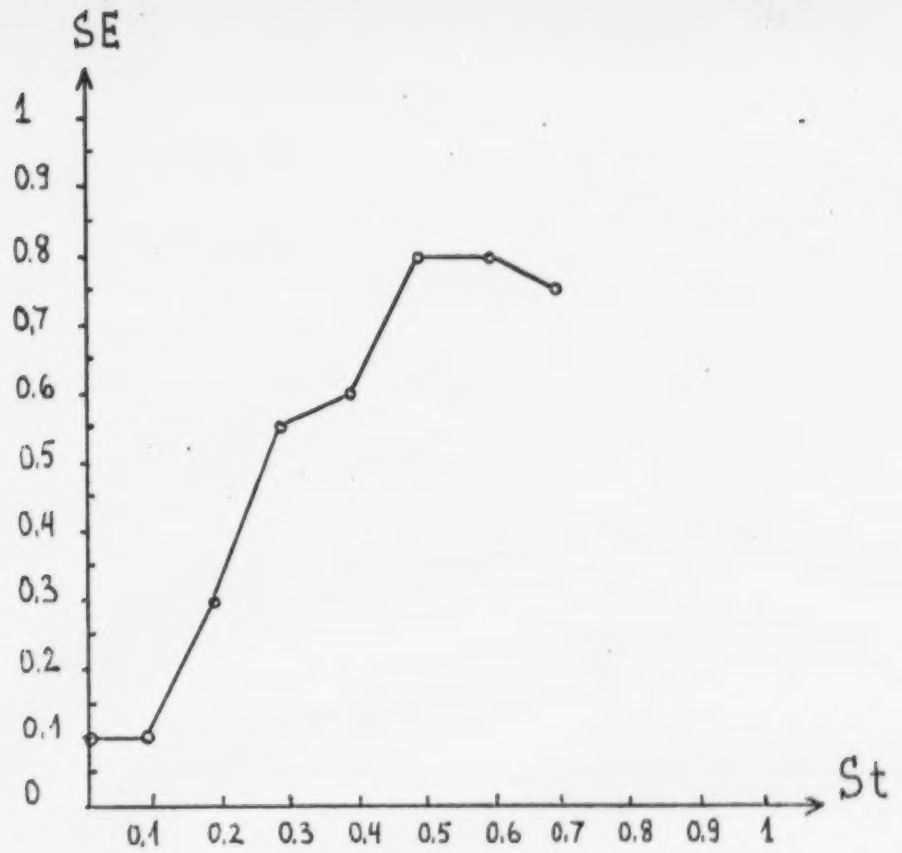

Fig.6. Courbe de la répartition du coefficient de satisfaction émotionnelle selon de St de l'enfant

y apportent une appréciation;

- ils adoptent et comprennent les normes du groupe;

- ils expriment leurs propres points de vue, prétentions et désirs;

- ils defendent leurs propres positions.

Nous avons établi que le coefficient de correlation entre la satisfaction émotionnelle et le niveau de communication verbale pour 54% des enfants est de 0,79, pour 30% des enfants - de 0,82, pour 10% - de 0,45 et pour 6% - de 0,41. Il existe donc une dépendance corrélative qui prouve, que l'usage de moyens verbaux de communication avec leurs différentes fonctions, influence lui aussi sur l'appui social pour l'enfant.

CONCLUSIONS

L'activité de l'enfant dans le contexte des relations interpersonelles dans le groupe est une matérialisation de l'influence des mécanismes d'action du milieu social sur son attitude et son comportement.

L'appui social , apparaissant et se modifiant conformément à l'accumulation d'interaction et d'interrelation au sein du groupe, déterminées d'une façon complexe, se révèle un important paramètre d'interaction du milieu social et de l'enfant.

La presance de l'appui social assure à l'enfant une possibilité d'ajouter à l'essence adaptive des interrelations sociales son comportement individuel, qui découle de la "libre volonté".

Les changements qui interviennent dans l'attitude du milieu envers l'enfant concret, en tant que membre du groupe, dépendent dans une grande mesure du dynamisme interne, de la structure et des caractéristiques fonctionnelles des contacts sociaux au sein du groupe. Dans ce sens ,le processus de communication est à la fois un processus d'adaptation, d'auto-organi-

sation, d'autoaffirmation qui permet de trouver un sens personnel dans les mecanismes communicatifs et dans l'interprétation et l'appréciation des phénomènes sociaux par la personne concrète.

L'appui social, au sein du groupe social, permet à l'enfant de conserver , dans une grande mesure, son identité, son autonomie et sa libre volonté.

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